

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL  
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: JOHN GRAHAM  
INTERVIEWER: SYLVIA CONTOVER  
DATE: AUGUST 8, 1986**

**J = JOHN  
S = SYLVIA**

**86.29**

**NOTE: Throughout the interview Sylvia's voice is very faint, and often times her questions and/or comments cannot be heard.**

J: ...being interviewed by the Lowell Historical Society, at 28 Forest Street, Lowell, Mass.

S: This is Sylvia Contover interviewing Mr. Graham at his home at 28 Forest Street, and he's going to tell us about his family. Mr. Graham why don't you tell us about your father? When did he come to Lowell?

J: He came here in 1905. (S: Umhm) And I don't know who he came to, but his first job was out in South Chelmsford.

S: You know why he came to Lowell, and not someplace else in the state?

J: Well there was (were) a lot of people around from his own home in Ireland that was located in Lowell at the time.

S: What place in Ireland was this?

J: Ah, County Antrim. (S: Umhm) Ah, he eventually got a job, but he didn't work out in South Chelmsford too long. He was working for Hanson out there. But ah (--)

S: What did Hanson make?

J: Father was working, my father was a blacksmith. He was a blacksmith in Ireland for years before he came here.

S: So he had a trade?

J: Right. So he worked as a blacksmith for Hanson. Then he left them, and went to work for the Locks and Canal. And he got one of their tenements, which was on the corner of Broadway and Dutton Street. The Locks and Canals owned a long row house that went up like towards the city hall from Market Street. And he had the corner house. And he lived there until I was six, around five and a half to six years old.

S: Can you explain what the Locks and Canal were?

J: The Locks and Canals maintained the canals and everything affiliated with them.

S: And did they provide homes for the workers?

J: Yes, they had some homes in there that were. A lot of the help had these apartments in this long row house.

S: Umhm.

J: It's now torn down. The Locks and Canals was right across the street from us. My father had his blacksmith shop down in the back of that, on the right-hand side, right along the canal. Ah, he'd sharpen drills, and he made different tools and did different things, and he even made iron fences years ago.

S: What do you call those tools you have here? Did they belong to your father?

J: Yah, these two tools were for drilling holes in stone, like granite. These two tools are called chisels, similar to what he used to cut that big plate that was on top of the big, big boom, or whatever it was on top of the Francis Foley (Folly) Gate. He used these chisels similar to this, with a very heavy hammer, and he kept hitting it until the plate eventually broke and down went the gate.

S: Now what happened at the gate? Tell us more about the Francis Gate?

J: That's about all I can tell you. That's all. See the father worked in the blacksmith shop.

S: But what did they use that gate for? What was it used for?

J: Flood purposes.

S: Umhm.

J: And Dad was sent up for, he was sent up to do a lot of iron work for the Lowell Cemetery on Lawrence Street. I don't know whether he made the iron fence, or whether

he made the iron gates up there, but he did do a lot of work along the canals. [Clears throat]

S: Now the fence that he put up around the cemetery, that wasn't the work he did for the canals, the Locks and Canals, was it?

J: No, but I think he did that work. (S: I see) I think somebody might have contacted some official and asked if he could do it, (S: Umhm) but he did make iron fences around some of the entrances to the canal along the mills, the main offices of the mills and things like that.

S: Now he didn't have anything to do with building the Francis Gate, did he?

J: Oh no, that was built a long time before his time.

S: Okay. So when did he let the gate fall? When did he (--)

J: That was during the big flood in 1936.

S: So that's 50 years ago. Was that the first time the gate was used?

J: I don't know. I really couldn't say, but I know it had been up for a good many years.

S: Umhm. Well, what else did he do? [Sentence unclear].

J: No, but he spent all those years (--) Well he...we moved out to Chelmsford, near Chelmsford, Billerica, when I was about five and a half or six. And we lived out there until ah, I was around thirteen, thirteen and a half years of age.

S: Did your father marry an Irish girl? (J: Yes) How many children did they have?

J: Five. (S: Five?) Three boys and two girls.

S: And what did you children do? What kind of work did you do? Did you work in the mills?

J: No.

S: None of you?

J: No, I went to work for the railroad.

S: The B&M?

J: Right. I went to work for the railroad and I worked for them for forty six years, about forty six and a half years.

S: Oh, what did you do there?

J: I was foreman of the signal repair shop.

S: Where is that?

J: Out in Billerica. All the signal material that failed was sent into the shop to be repaired.

S: Oh. What kind of work did you do, blacksmith work?

J: Oh no! No. They had a big blacksmith shop there, a big one, but I didn't do that. This is all smaller work. (S: Oh) Electrical, electronic, mechanical, was mostly is what the work called for.

S: Did any of the children follow in your father's footsteps and go into blacksmith? Nobody? Was that no longer needed? That kind of work was no longer required?

J: Well I (--) When I was young I can remember blacksmith shops almost being about every third block, there was blacksmith shops. Then as years went by, a lot of them closed up and closed up. And then last I remember, I don't know how old I was, there was only two or three of them left in the city.

S: What did the blacksmith do in the city?

J: They ah, they shod horses

S: So that was their main work?

J: That was their main work, and they'd do other iron work if somebody came in. See years ago they did a lot of welding. Blacksmiths would heat up two pieces of metal and they could weld them. And they made iron things. Somebody wanted something iron made, or something, they'd make it. But the father, he, the Locks and Canals had a pair of horses, and they had one that use to drive the man around. And they had three horses, and the father shod them. But he never liked shoeing. In fact, my father's brother Henry was boss of Daniel Gage's Blacksmith Shop. It was up on Walker Street was it? And he wanted my father to come up there and go to work when he first come over to this country. See the uncle was already working there, and the father wouldn't take the job, because he didn't like shoeing horses. That was an every day piece of work.

S: Well what was Daniel Gage? What kind of company was that?

J: Big ice company, (S: Oh) they delivered ice all over the city. They'd come up, go up and down every street and stop. And you'd holler out the window, I want a twenty cent

piece or a thirty-five cent piece, whatever you wanted. And they'd take the pick and pick out how large the block could be, you know.

S: Now when you were a little boy was it just horses on the street, and no cars?

J: Just horses.

S: No cars.

J: Just horses.

S: That was the only means of transportation?

J: No, they had the trolley cars.

S: Oh they had the trolley cars?

J: That's right. They had the trolley cars. Then I was about six, five and a half or six, I can remember living in Lowell then. We moved out to East, East Chelmsford out near Billerica. And when we went out there, Gorham Street was nothing but a dirt road with two tracks off to one side. The trolleys went out to North Billerica, Billerica Center. Then eventually that got all paved over. And then we moved when I was around thirteen, or thirteen and a half, we moved to East Chelmsford, down into the last house in Lowell on Gorham Street, which is now on the edge of 495 and Gorham Street. And we lived there, and the father and mother lived there, and mother died there, and father died there.

S: Now where did you go to church? What was your parish?

J: Sacred Heart then

S: Yah, but you started out in the Acre?

J: Started out in the Acre.

S: Umhm, then you went to St. Patrick's Church?

J: Right

S: Was that the only church at that time in Lowell when you were little, was St. Patrick's?

J: I don't know, I really don't know to tell you the truth. I really don't know. Then I, when I went to work for the railroad, I started to go to the night school up there at the Lowell Textile School then. And the first year, first two year course I completed, I was offered a job by the Locks and Canals, and I turned it down. So my father told him that he had a younger boy, and then they wanted to know his age and so on and so forth, and

the Locks and Canals hired him. And he used to read water meters. He'd start out in the morning and he visited so many mills, and he'd read the meters and he'd put the information in the book. And he'd make his rounds, and it took him perhaps till pretty close to about 12 o'clock. And he'd go back to the office, and he'd sit down and he'd transfer all of the information from the book to a sheet, a paper. Then there was another young fellow that worked for him, John Scullin's boy, John Scullin.

S: Umhm.

J: He worked for them and he walked another route, and took pretty near the same time, and he'd come back and he'd take all the information from his book and he'd put it on the sheet.

S: So the Locks and Canal charged the mills for the amount of water they were using?

J: Apparently they did.

S: [Unclear] because I've never heard of that before.

J: Umhm. Apparently they did. Although the Locks and Canals, from the information that I had known about them, the Locks and Canals was originally created by all the mills (S: umhm) got together and they put all the money in that was needed to start the Locks and Canals.

S: Umhm. That's just so that they could maintain the canals. [Unclear]

J: That's right.

S: Now do you remember them using the canals for transportation?

J: No I don't.

S: They just used it for mills then for waterpower.

J: Now in the wintertime the father had to get up early in the morning, and of course the father had a horse and a buggy. He used to ride back and fourth to work. And he'd go down to that canal that went underneath the Strand Theater, back a ways somewhere in there. No. [J: is thinking] But anyways, father would go down there. They had long poles. There was a shanty house, and father use to stop in there before he'd come home at night, and he'd put coal on the fire, and then put coal on the fire in the morning before he left there. But that place was always warm.

S: The workers went into the shanty to warm up?

J: Yah. Then they'd get these long poles and they'd get out, and on top of the canal, and they had to push these blocks of ice along and get them over the dam so that they could

continue on. Sam Pollard worked that dam, which, it used to be around (--) I don't know whether the dam is still there or not, where the new hotel is?

S: Umhm, and then (--)

J: Sam Pollard worked there at that dam. John Scullin worked the dam. Well it's a parking lot now, the parking lot off Dutton Street. You go in and off to your right was John Scullin's dam. He worked that.

S: So they each had their own dam that they worked?

J: Barney Hamel worked the dam up off of Moody Street then. You'd take a road and go down and Barney's had ah, there was a dam there with a shanty, and Barney worked there.

S: Do you remember how many hours they used to work then?

J: Eight hours.

S: Eight hours. How about, were there night shifts?

J: No.

S: Oh, they didn't have anything at night?

J: No. They, what they would do, the dams had these long boards, and they had two long handles, wooden handles attached to them, and they stuck up in the air. And if a mill called up and said they wanted more water, they'd go out and just get a hold of two of the sticks and they'd pull that board right out of there. One, or two, or three, whatever was required that let more water go through.

S: Umhm. So your father had to do that?

J: Oh, father used to make the irons for attaching the poles to the plant.

S: Oh could you tell us what your father's name is, was?

J: James, James Graham, James P.

S: James. And he was the one that let down the gate, the Francis Gate so that we wouldn't get flooded. [Unclear]. Now, is his brother, is his brother still around, the one that worked at the mill?

J: He didn't work. Alex was just, walked around and read meters. That's all he did. (S: I see) And John Scullin, the boy, he walked around and read meters too. My brother's dead, and John Scullin is dead.

S: Oh, I see. So they're not around. Do you know any of the people who worked in the canals that are still living?

J: I understand Harold [Kenyon?], [Kenyon?] is still living.

S: Umhm.

J: That was my, he was my father's helper, blacksmith helper. (S: Oh!) At times, if the father needed somebody to help him, they'd send Harold down.

S: Well, he must be quite old?

J: Well I was talking to someone from the Lowell Historical Society, and I happened to mention his name. And they said, "Do you know he's still alive?"

S: Oh!

J: He's over in a rest home on Hildreth Street. (S: Umhm) And they said they were over and talking to him, and his mind is very good. They told me, [S: Unclear] yah.

S: Do you know any of the other people that worked in the mills that would still be living?

J: The mills, or the Locks?

S: Well not the mills, the canals mostly, because there are still many people who worked the mills that are still living. [Sentence unclear]

J: I do.

S: Now did your other brothers still work in the city?

J: No. Alex, he ah, he left the Locks, and then he worked in the filling station. He ran a filling station for somebody else across the street from the home on Gorham Street. It wasn't directly across. It was like on a slant. Then he went in the service. No, no, he left the filling station and he went to work for ah, the place down on Middlesex Street, a sewing machine repairman. And of course he had the keys. He'd open the place in the morning, get the boilers working so he could get the steam and, to press these clothes they were making. They were making women's skirts and women's coats, you know, sport coats?

S: Umhm.

J: And they did a lot of pressing. And then of course, his job was when the truck come he had to get everything ready for the truck. And he'd go down and he'd help load the



truck, and away they'd go. Ah, then he left that and he went to work for the post, postal service. The oldest brother he, he started to work in the Tremont and Suffolk [unclear]. Then he left there and he went [unclear] construction work. And I went to work for him. Well I went to work for [O. P. Beal] as a plumber's helper. I stayed with it for a year and a half, and then I left him. And then I went to work on the railroad.

S: It must have been a good steady job in those days. When other people were unemployed, you were working.

J: That's right. I can remember the depression. (S: Umhm) Father worked. I was working, and my oldest brother Jimmy was working. And we had twelve acres of farm, and we, even when we were youngsters we had to go out in the field and work, weeding and hoeing, and weeding and hoeing, cutting the grass and making hay and all that stuff. And we always had a piece of land up near the house where we had everything in it, beans, and rhubarb and corn; potatoes, early potatoes, and all that stuff; tomatoes and peppers, green peppers and all that.

S: So your father owned the house?

J: Oh yah, yah, he owned it.

S: Did he own all the houses that you lived in outside of the [unclear]?

J: No, he owned the one out in East Chelmsford, near Billerica. And he owned the one here on Gorham Street.

S: But he was able to buy houses?

J: Right.

S: While he worked for the Locks and Canals.

J: Umhm. Umhm.

S: And each time he'd buy a bigger house, is that the idea?

J: Right. Right. All those people, practically all of them that lived in the row house, practically all of them, and they saved up a little money. They went out to Pawtucketville, all around and they bought houses.

S: Umhm, but the mill workers in those days didn't earn enough money to buy houses. (Sentence unclear) How about your sisters? What did they do then for work?

J: Well the oldest sister, she went to the school over at St. John's to be a nurse. She graduated. She stayed with the hospital. She retired last February. The youngest sister, she went to a business school for a couple of years, and then she came to work for the

railroad. She worked in the office out where I was working, in the same location. And then she got married and she left there.

S: Now you say when you went and got married [rest of sentence unclear].

J: Most of them, most of them all did.

S: Umhm, umhm.

J: Most of them.

S: What year did you get married?

J: I got married in 1937, the year after the flood.

S: Umhm.

J: Cause I was home when the father came home from work this night, and told us what he did (S: umhm) and dropping the gate. I said to Dad, "Were you scared?" He said, "I'm telling you I was scared." He said, "I was sitting on that big white beam, and he says, when that dropped, and he said, it shook the whole place." He said, "I went down my stomach." He was sitting on it. He went down on his stomach and he put his hand around it, and he was holding on to that beam. He was afraid that the beam might crack or break, or something, or turn over.

S: Umhm. And that saved the city from being flooded that year?

J: Right, right.

S: [Unclear] had a flood down Broadway?

J: Well the gate did not stop all the water.

S: Oh it didn't?

J: From that piece I read in the paper there.

S: Umhm.

J: There was water still leaking through. But the paper said the W.P.A. helped, came up and they put a lot of sand bags and things in to help hold the water back.

S: Umhm.

J: And I guess it did hold most of it back. There was a little got through. Yes, that was very, very bad, umhm.

S: And you met your wife in Lowell? Where did you meet your wife?

J: Yah, in Lowell, yah.

S: [And you got married]. How many children did you have?

J: I had four, two girls and two boys.

S: Umhm. [Sentences unclear]. Are they in the city?

J: No. One of them lives up Leominster. The other one is North Chelmsford, and one's in Westford. And the other boy is living under me.

S: Umhm. Are they working in the city, for the city?

J: No.

S: [Unclear]?

J: No, no. The oldest is a girl, she works up to Fort Devens. She used to be the (--) She was running the computer room where they used to gather all the information on every boy, or girl that came into that Fort. They'd come in with a piece of paper with history on it, and everything happen to them while they were in the service. And the daughter would order some girl to take them, and put them into a machine, and that machine would transfer everything to a card, which would punch holes.

S: Umhm.

J: Then when it was completed, we'd lift it out, put another sheet in, and another punch card. Type the name in the middle of the card. Then those cards were all filed into the machine.

S: Umhm.

J: And at anytime they could call those persons name, or number, or whatever they listed them, I don't know, but the machine would start and flip them all over, and out come the card you were looking for.

S: Umhm.

J: And probably the fellow had a tooth pulled. (S: Umhm) So they had to put that information in. Punch a hole. Then they'd give them the card and go back in again. Now the oldest boy, he owns [Pack Line].

S: What's that?

J: Electronic assembly place.

S: Oh!

J: Another type of work. Ah, he is located down off Route 110 in Dracut, on the way going to Lawrence. Then the next is a girl, and she's a P.C. board designer. And she's worked [unclear] in Westford. She's working in Chelmsford for this outfit that does very precise work for the government. And Billy downstairs, he works for Wang. He's an engineer. It isn't in research and development, it's on field work or something. I don't know what.

S: How many children do they have? Do they have large families?

J: The oldest girl has four.

S: Umhm.

J: And then the boy has two. And the girl has two. And then, downstairs, the boy has, well he married a divorcee with two girls, and then they had one baby since. So he's got three.

S: So they had small families. The first people that came in as immigrants had large families.

J: It was either twelve or thirteen in the father's family over in Ireland. Mother's family was pretty near the same, twelve or thirteen people.

S: Umhm, and then how many, then they had large families here too, didn't they?

J: Well, the father and mother had (--) Well the father and mother had five living. Then they had another boy, he died when he was a year old. Then the mother had one dead at still birth.

S: Umhm, so they had about seven. And then you had left, all his children had left. And then your, your grandchildren haven't even left. [Words unclear]

J: I don't know.

S: Is it because [unclear] to work?

J: Maybe, maybe. (S: Unclear) See I didn't get married till I was twenty seven.

S: Umhm.

J: I started a little late in life.

S: Umhm.

J: Ah, a lot of people were married (--) When I was young a lot of people got married when they were eighteen, nineteen, twenty years of age. I got married when I was twenty-seven. Probably a lot of people had two and three children by that, by that time.

S: That's the reason for your having a smaller family.

J: Right, that may have something to do with it too.

S: Now why did you wait so long [unclear]?

J: No, no, just had no urge of getting married.

S: I see. I thought maybe [rest of sentence unclear].

J: No.

S: Can you tell me what Lowell, downtown Lowell was like in those days? [Unclear]

J: What I remember about it, they're trying to rebuild it to make it look like it was years ago, but they can't do it, they just can't. Well of course a lot of these buildings have been torn down, and this and that [unclear], but, you know, they just can't do it.

S: Did they have the city hall the way they have it now? [Unclear]

J: City Hall is exactly the way it was... is the same now, as it was years ago, city hall.

S: [Unclear]. (J: Umhm) [Unclear] the trolleys downtown?

J: Right, they had the trolleys.

S: And they had shopping downtown?

J: Umhm, they had all the stores. They had quite a few stores downtown.

S: Was it crowded in those days, [the streets]?

J: Yes, yes it was.

S: [Unclear]

J: Umhm, umhm.

S: Did the people dress well?

J: Yes, a lot of them dressed well. Umhm.

S: Was there a lot of [congestion] downtown?

J: No, I wouldn't say there was. (S: No?) No.

S: Because there were no cars back then.

J: No cars.

S: No traffic. How about these, the horses and buggies [in the street]? [Unclear]

J: Well during, during the day they'd be a lot of horses and buggies.

S: Oh I see.

J: Umhm, umhm. Not too many at night.

S: But most people walk downtown to shop?

J: They'd take a trolley.

S: I see.

J: Go down to shop, and then get on a trolley and come back home.

S: Those trolleys were very popular [unclear]?

J: Umhm, and they were cheaper to ride too in those days.

S: Cheaper than running horses?

J: Right, right.

S: Horses must be pretty expensive.

J: Yes. [S: Unclear] Get them shod. You had to feed them, and get hay for them. But of course we had about twelve acres of land, and lots of hay, and lots of food and everything else. I can remember one year we had a cellar so full of potatoes, and squash, and cabbage. And at one end of it there was over four hundred jars of green beans, yellow beans and I don't know, chili sauce and everything else, all put out; stewed tomatoes and everything, over [unclear]. And us boys and girls, we had to sit in the kitchen. Mother had a great big metal tub. And we'd put chairs around. And we'd all sit and snap beans. Get the tub full. And then mother would be getting them in the jars, and

cooking them, and then get them out and then she'd seal them. And then they'd go down the cellar.

S: That's when you lived out on Gorham Street and you had the farm?

J: East Chelmsford and (S: Oh East Chelmsford) Gorham Street, both.

S: Did you have running water? Did you have toilet facilities there?

J: Out in East Chelmsford, no. We had a pump at the kitchen sink.

S: Oh, but it was indoors. (J: Umhm) You didn't need to go out.

J: No facility, we had an outhouse.

S: Umhm.

J: When we moved down to Gorham Street you had running water, gas, lights up at the ceiling. (S: Umhm) We had them little bags, like silk [baggies] to go over it. And there was running water in the house. There was no central heating.

S: Umhm. What did you heat with?

J: Two stoves, and cold bedrooms and everything else. But we were young. We were used to it. (S: Unclear) But I put a, I put a one pipe furnace in there, the house on Gorham Street. (S: Oh you did) And we used that for quite a few years, until the stove inside this one pipe furnace just burned out.

S: [Unclear]

J: That's right. And the metal just aged and got thin, and had to throw it out. Well we didn't throw it out. It's still there, but you're just not able to use it.

S: [Unclear]

J: The one pipe furnace, yah.

S: [Unclear]

**Tape I, side A ends**  
**Tape I, side B begins**

S: How are you related?

J: Yah. He was a first or second cousin of my father.

S: And what was he in politics? Was he a mayor?

J: A mayor. And then I (--) I don't know whether he was manager, whether they had managers at the time or not. No.

S: [Unclear]. What do you know about the department stores? What department stores were downtown?

J: A.G. Pollard's, Five & Dime, Grants. Was it Grants? (S: Unclear) Page's, TV place there.

S: Page's was a restaurant?

J: Umhm.

S: And what other places were downtown? What other restaurants were downtown?

J: Chinese restaurant.

S: There was a Chinese restaurant? Where?

J: At the Square.

S: [Unclear]

J: You know where ah, what's that candy company that use to be on the corner?

S: The Crown [unclear].

J: No, there was a candy on Merrimack Street. (S: Fanny Farmer?) Fanny Farmer. Donaldson's. Donaldson's Film Store there, going down towards the Square. Well, the Chinese Restaurant, you took a...opened the door, you went up a flight, and they were upstairs.

S: Oh I see.

J: And then there was another Chinese Restaurant up on Central Street.

S: Umhm.

J: I've forgotten where it was. All I know, it was before you got to the Strand Theater going down. And you had to go up a flight too, for that.

S: Were there any cafeterias in Lowell?

J: No.



S: (Question unclear)

J: Oh Page's, downstairs in Page's was like a cafeteria.

S: No, across from Page's was where the Waldorf and the Plaza, the Plaza Lunch and the Waldorf.

J: I can't remember them, but I remember the Waldorf up at the railroad depot.

S: There was another one up there?

J: In the corner, yah.

S: Umhm.

J: And then there was one on Central Street too, almost across from the old Rialto Theater. There was one in there too. I don't remember one being downtown, but we use to have a lot of those lunch carts. You know, they, like a lunch place. They were on wheels, and one horse could pull them. But they did, they'd get them, pull them, and then they'd leave them on the corner near the main street. There was one at Jackson Street, the corner of Jackson and Central Street. It sat there for years. Then there was one on Middlesex Street. It was pulled up into an alley like, on the side and that sat there for years. I can remember them being in different parts of the city.

S: They moved them around, is that it?

J: Yah, but as a rule they, they just move them and leave them there, you know?

S: I see. And what did they sell there? Do you know?

J: Oh you'd go in, have a cup of coffee, a sandwich.

S: And there's a place you could go in and sit down?

J: Yah, sit down.

S: Was it like a diner?

J: Similar to a diner, umhm.

S: Was it bigger than a diner, or was it smaller?

J: Smaller, that's all, it was much smaller.

S: Was there many diners around in those days?

J: Oh there was quite a few of them (S: Umhm) around. Then of course the bigger diners came in, the ones that they moved and became permanent. Like the one over on Bridge Street. Now it's right next to the canal.

S: Umhm.

J: And there's one down here on the other side of the Burger King. Ah, isn't there one up near the City Hall there, on Dutton Street, next to the filling station? I think there's one still up there. (S: Umhm) There use to be one up near the railroad depot too.

S: Now how old is [unclear]?

J: Well I can remember on Market Street, the railroad station there on Market Street. There was a lot of brick houses from there right down to the police station, and a few stores. (S: Umhm) I can remember years, much, years later and later, there was a package store opened up there. Then he went over to Bridge Street. He opened a package store over there. Ah, on the other side of Market Street I can remember a barroom there. It had the swinging doors, you know, and the sawdust on the floor. I used to open the door when I was a kid, and I'd look in. You'd have a big, a big jar of white eggs, pickled fresh eggs. Then they'd have another big plate of sandwiches made up, you know? You could go in, five cents a glass a beer, and help yourself to sandwiches and raw eggs, or cooked. Some of them were raw, and some were cooked.

S: They had those swinging doors?

J: Yes.

S: The ones you see in the movies?

J: Right, right.

S: Did they have many places like that?

J: There used to be quite a few of them years ago. (S: umhm) The Irish were all heavy drinkers, heavy. They drank a lot.

S: [Unclear]

J: That's true.

S: Did that get them in trouble, or?

J: (Laughs) Ah, I guess a lot of them got feeling pretty dam good, but they're always able to get home and get to bed.

S: Umhm. Did the Police help them to get home?

J: No. No, they never got into trouble, they never got into trouble. But I can remember being a kid, and we never locked our doors at night. Didn't have to.

S: Umhm.

J: We never had any trouble with the younger children, boys or girls, nothing. I can remember one night, around one o'clock in the morning, my mother woke me up and there was a cow going to have a calf. And things wasn't just right. And she asked me to walk out to Billerica. It must have been about a two-mile walk. She woke me up at one o'clock in the morning. She asked me to go out to Billerica and get this man, George Connolly to come in. Tell him the story that the cow was going to have a calf, and she was in trouble. I got up and I get dressed and I walked two miles up Gorham Street. No automobiles on the road, nothing, just these old style electric lights, you know, with a shade over them. It lit up. It would be spotty, you know? It'd light up, then you'd have a dark area, and then you know? I'd walk out there and nobody ever bothered me. And I rapped the door, and I got him out of bed, and I told him the story. And so he got dressed and he come out. And he had a Ford truck. And he got it started, and we come back in the truck.

S: And what did he do to help the cow?

J: Whatever it was, he got the thing corrected. And the cow gave birth to a, I don't what it was, a little heifer or a bull, I don't know which.

S: How many cows did you have?

J: One cow. Father always had a cow, a heifer, and a little calf.

S: Umhm.

J: Couple of pigs in the summer, and about a hundred or more chickens, hens.

S: So you had plenty of food.

J: We had barrels of food. The depression, the depression didn't even hurt us.

S: Umhm.

J: See that churn over there?

S: Yah.

J: That's what my mother made butter in.

S: Really! Now that is a great artifact for the (unclear).

J: Oh, no. I'm not going to part with that.

S: No, but if you ever want to give it up.

J: Oh no, no.

S: You have a butter churner here?

J: Right. It's what my mother made butter with. When (--) I can remember her making that, eleven, I was eleven, twelve years of age. And she made it probably twice a week. She'd get the milk and put it in round dishes, had sharp edges in it. Leave it stay there for two or three days at room temperature. And then she had a jar, and she had a big spoon. She'd go around. She'd get all the cream off the top of that.

S: Umhm.

J: Then she'd put the cream in the jar. Then she'd put the cream in the refrigerator, and she'd do that a couple of times during the week. And then she'd put the cream in there and churn it.

S: Now if they wanted me to take a picture of that, would you allow me to take a picture of that?

J: Yes, and I'm not going get rid of it.

S: No, I don't blame you. It's a [unclear].

J: There isn't too many things I got. We sold the house a week ago last. It was last week.

S: Oh just recently,

J: Yah, we completely sold it.

S: Umhm.

J: We're not quite out of there. We'll be out of there in probably another couple of weeks.

S: Umhm.

J: And due to grandchildren, you know, and this and that, and everything, I haven't been able to get much of anything out of there.

S: Umhm.

J: So I did get that and the butter printer.

S: Umhm. [Unclear]

J: Nobody can go in and take anything.

S: Oh, because you sold it?

J: No, because there's a little fuss with the grandchildren wanting to go in. Grandchildren from two different families, and they wanted to go in and look at everything. What we're afraid of is they want too much. And the other grandchildren don't like it. So we shut off all grandchildren or anybody else from coming in.

S: Umhm.

J: But I did get that out of there, that and the butter printer.

S: [Unclear]

J: That's old.

S: Umhm. Do you know about bootlegging in those days?

J: Well, as I started to get a little older, I might have been around fifteen or sixteen. Then the Polish people (--) Are you Polish?

S: No, my background is Greek.

J: Greek. Do you know Alice (Kokonakos?)

S: No, I know the name.

J: You know the name. (S: Yes) Well I can remember the Polish people down around Ben's Court.

S: [Unclear]

J: Gorham Street.

S: Okay.

J: Just up a little ways. Just come up Gorham Street a little ways is Ben's Court, and across from that.

S: Umhm.

J: A lot of the Polish people were making, we called it moonshine, but they called it glass. And ah, yah, there was people making it and selling it.

S: Umhm.

J: Making beer and selling beer and all that. Oh yes!

S: But everybody new where to go and get it?

J: That's right.

S: Umhm.

J: That's right.

S: And ah. (--)

J: Now that was during the prohibition period.

S: Right.

S: And didn't they get in trouble?

J: Yes, a lot of them did.

S: Umhm.

J: They got arrested, released, and then come back and appeared before the judge. And he'd fine them and let them go. They'd go right back selling again.

S: They never went to jail?

J: No, no.

S: So was this big business in those days, the people that (--)

J: A lot of them, it was (--). Well it was, a lot of them worked out of their own homes, you know? (S: Umhm) There was a few clubs. Gee, I'll never forget one time, course we always had (--). For a few years, when I was probably about fifteen years of age, in the summer we went very heavy on the garden. We put 1500 tomato plants in, we put 1500 cabbage plants in, and we had lots of corn and everything else. I made a lot of money in two years time on those things. So I use to spend all afternoon getting everything ready and putting it in bushel boxes. Getting up at 3:30 in the morning, get the horse hitched up, back it up to the team, get him all hooked up, get out of the house and go down. Do you remember where the Commodore used to be?

S: Yes.

J: We used to back the wagons into the common there, right along Thorndike Street.

S: The South Common?

J: Umhm.

S: Hm.

J: All the farmers, horses with wagons or farmers with trucks and all. Then these (--) During that period is when we use to have the vegetables. The man going up and down the streets, you know, with a horse and a wagon, selling vegetables. (S: Umhm) Do you remember that years ago? (S: Ya) That was during that period. (S: Umhm) And we use to sell tomatoes. I sold tomatoes, and cabbage, and beans and everything, you know, whatever we had a good supply of. (S: Umhm) But I'll never forget this time. Tomatoes were three boxes for a dollar. Three of them, sixty pounds of tomatoes were in each box. How foolish I was to take them down there. But this woman, she was Polish woman, she come over from. (--) Well she didn't live in Ben's Court, but another street off of back Central Street, down in that area. And she paid me for three boxes and she said, "I want you to deliver them to my house." And she had a piece of paper and she put the number and the address, and everything on it, and gave it to me. I went to the house and she was up on the second floor, or the third floor. And I had to take them, put one box, sixty pounds on my shoulders, and go up, I think it was two flights, and I told her I wouldn't leave her the box. We never sold the boxes. We would exchange them, but we wouldn't sell them. So she got, I don't know what she got, but anyways, we got the tomatoes out of there, and I went back. I carried the three of them up and ooh! When I got up with the last one, she had this big container of moonshine and she poured me a glass over three quarters full and she said, here. But I was only fifteen years of age. I wouldn't take it. (S: Unclear) From that day on, I didn't bother taking anymore tomatoes down to the market, because I knew I couldn't sell them there and I didn't want to go all over the city delivering either up one, two, or three flights of stairs. It wasn't, it wasn't even worth it.

S: Hm. So you haven't tasted, you didn't taste the moonshine in those days? You never tasted it?

J: No. No. [Unclear] See, we grew up, but we were mostly at home all the time. My mother kept us busy around the place. We had chickens to feed. We had pigs to feed. Cows had to be fed hay and grain, and watered. If they were out in the field, we'd have to go out and chain them, because they were on a chain. Then we'd have to pull the things out of the ground and move the chain and over, and then push this thing back in the ground so they'd have new grass to eat. There was always something doing around there. Then during the summer you're out planting seeds and planting everything else. And then when this stuff started to grow, we had to cultivate it, and we had to hoe it and everything. We were always busy. We were not out hanging around streets.

S: [Unclear]

J: No, we were mostly around the house all the time.

S: Umhm.

J: As I say, a lot of these people like, children were born like further in closer to the city, they had nothing to do and they were just hanging around in the streets. As I say, a lot of them were street wise.

S: Umhm.

J: My brothers and I were not street wise.

S: [Unclear]

J: Busy. That's right.

S: What did you do for entertainment? Do you remember as you got older?

J: Oh, as we got older I can remember us having a radio. Somebody years ago, they sold all of these parts for radios in the Five and Dime. They sold these boards to make a box, and a cover, and a bottom. And they sold a black front for the radio. Then you could buy the tubes in the Five and Dime. You could buy the sockets and you could buy these bars of metal for the circuits you know. Some of them were bent, some were straight. And somebody made this radio and they wanted to make a bigger one. So my brother was working down the Tremont and Suffolk Mill. And so he bought it and brought it home.

S: [Unclear]. What programs did you listen too?

J: We had to use ear phones.

S: So you only listened one at a time then?

J: Well we used to do a little better than that. We used to get a bowl, you know. We'd put the earphones over a bowl, and the bowl would like amplify it. We'd leave the bowl up you know, from the table. The bowl would amplify it, and two or three people could hear it.

S: [Unclear].

J: Then we moved on. And then when we were living over on Gorham Street, the family bought a [brand name unclear] that had a speaker. That was a big improvement, the radio then. Amos and Andy was on and a few other stories, you know. Then we went along, and then we got the console TV.



S: Now did you have a phonograph?

J: Yes.

S: Now how would that work?

J: Crank it.

S: You had to crank it?

J: Put the records in. We were looking at it two or three weeks ago. I don't think there's any needles for it. They don't make those needles anymore, you know. (S: Umhm) But there was a whole cabinet, and the record player was on the top. You had to crank it. Then you open these doors in the front, and that let the sound come out. And underneath you'd open two doors and your records all stood up there, you know, underneath.

S: [Unclear]. Do you remember any songs?

J: (Pauses for a few seconds) Al Jolson.

S: Al Jolson was playing then.

J: Yah, he was singing then. Al Jolson [unclear]. Of course they'd have Irish songs, you know, and that kind of stuff.

S: Did the songs come from Ireland then, those records?

J: No.

S: No, they were made here in the United States?

J: They were made in the states. (S: Umhm) John McCormick, great Irish tenor. I had some of his. (S: Umhm) I can remember seeing his. And years later when we had our latest style record players, the electronic ones, you know, (S: Umhm) I've taken some of those records and brought them over here and played them. And they sound so different. And they were different sounds in there that we never heard of on the regular, regular record player, you see.

S: Hm. [Unclear]

J: Yes, yes.

S: You still have those records?

J: I don't think I have them. I brought them all back.

S: You brought them back where, the your house?

J: To the house.

S: Hm. So that house must be filled with beautiful things, momentos about those early days of Lowell.

J: Not too much, not too much.

S: You know, like old record players and records.

J: Well the old phonograph is about the only thing, the old phonograph. That's about all.

S: You had electricity in that house?

J: Yes, we put electricity in.

S: So you modernized [unclear]?

J: Modernized it. Put the heat in.

S: Umhm.

J: And ah. (--)

S: Is the water pump still around?

J: No, that house didn't have the water pump.

S: Oh I see.

J: That was out in Billerica.

S: I see.

J: That was at the other house.

S: Oh.

J: Hm.

S: So you didn't do anything else for entertainment on the outside? Did you go to dances? [Teenage] dances?

J: I never learned how to dance.

S: You didn't. So where did you meet your wife?

J: A blind date!

S: [Unclear]

J: We were headed for the beach.

S: [Unclear]

J: She was working in Cherry and Webb's, and we went down and waited for her to come out of work.

S: Umhm.

J: Then we started for Lynn Beach, or Revere Beach. That's where I first met her.

S: So you didn't... the young people around you didn't go to dances or the Commodore?

J: Some of them did. Some of them did.

S: You never did?

J: No.

S: They weren't allowed to go?

J: No, they could have went, but none of us was interested.

S: Oh, because you were all busy enough.

J: Right. Then come night time we were tired.

S: Oh. What time did you have to get up in the morning?

J: Well, as I say, in the summer when the vegetables and everything started to come in, I had to get up at 3:30 in the morning. I was on... I was down there, around Thorndike Street before daybreak.

S: Umhm.

J: Day was breaking when I was packing the wagon.

S: Umhm. [Unclear]

J: Umhm. Umhm. That was during the summer. In the winter time I had to get up early. I had chickens to feed, or [unclear] to water, put hay down too, or something else. And we had to get cleaned up, washed up, and eat our breakfast, and get dressed and go to school.

S: Now where was the school?

J: I went to East Chelmsford School, to the 6th grade, to the 5th grade I think. No, the 6th grade, and then for the 7th and 8th I had to go over to Chelmsford Center.

S: Hm.

J: Then I went to High School over there.

S: Chelmsford High?

J: Chelmsford Center, yah.

S: They had a high school in Chelmsford Center?

J: Umhm, umhm. That's where the town hall is now.

S: Oh I see.

J: That was High School years ago.

S: Umhm. Now did all the family go to high school, all of your siblings?

J: Ah, I didn't go all the way through. I left school I think it was the third year or something. I didn't finish.

S: Umhm. How about your brothers and sisters?

J: Jimmy I don't think finished high school, but Alex finished it, and my two sisters finished it.

S: Umhm.

J: But then I spent seven years up at the University, well Textile School and a year down at the Vocational School.

S: (Unclear question)

J: I took two years of D.C. electricity. Two years of A.C. electricity. Two years of Math. Then I was taking two years of radio, but then the War II broke out. Was it War

II? And I had about a year in and I had to stop the course. So then the last year I went down to the Vocational School and finished it down there.

S: [Unclear].

J: No. (S: You didn't) No, the railroad had me deferred, and deferred, and deferred, and deferred.

S: I see. How about your brothers?

J: My youngest brother was called. He had to go.

S: Umhm.

J: He went into the Air Force. They put him in the Air Force.

S: Umhm.

J: He was over in England for quite sometime. And then when they invaded Europe, he was over in Europe.

S: Umhm.

J: Ah, the oldest brother was called, but he only had one eye, so they rejected him. He lost an eye in an automobile accident when he was around eighteen or nineteen years of age. So they rejected him. I never was called up.

S: Umhm. When did you get your first car in the family? Did your father buy a car?

J: No. The family never bought a car.

S: Oh, I see.

J: No. First car I think was owned by my brother, the oldest brother.

S: In the olden days did you have to crank it?

J: Yes.

S: To start it?

J: Yes, yes.

S: Did it take two people to get it started?

J: One sitting inside, and one cranking it. Then when I bought my first car, it was a Model T Ford. It had a starter, but you could also crank it too. If it wouldn't start you know, by starting it, you could get out and crank it.

S: The Model T was a big car, wasn't it?

J: Um, not so big. I had a one seat. It was like a coop, they called it a coop, one seat.

S: Hm. So that was a Model T? The one seat was a Model T? Were the larger cars called a Model T also? [Unclear]

J: Model T's. I think they were all Model T's then. All Model T's, T's, two door, four door.

S: How come your father never bought a car, because he had the horse and wagon?

J: He had the horse and buggy. (He laughs) My uncle (--) My Uncle Henry lived out in Chelmsford Center, (S: Umhm) the other side of Chelmsford Center. He always had a horse and buggy.

S: Umhm.

J: He said, "You can't say get up and ho," you know, meaning to stop. You can't say get up, "Get up, or ho," you know, to make them start and stop. He says, "These new automobiles (unclear), he says, you can't talk to them." So he says, "I don't want them." No, the father never was interested in it.

S: [Unclear]

J: Oh yes, yes, yes, umhm.

S: [Unclear]

J: Father and mother are dead, and my oldest brother is dead, and my youngest brother is dead.

S: Oh.

J: The two girls are living, and I'm living.

S: [Unclear]

J: Yah.

S: [Unclear]

J: Yes, fairly close.

S: You all lived together so you had to be close. After you got married were you still all close?

J: I wouldn't say that.

S: Marriage brought on difficulties?

J: No. After the wife died in sixty one, my family, well, they never was one to come over and visit you a lot. They seemed to keep away. And then the wife's family did the same thing. In fact, the wife's family, I don't think there's probably been one sister in the house since then, but her other brothers and sisters never come over.

S: Hm.

J: I was alone. I brought up two children. The youngest was a boy, five years old, and the girl was turning twelve.

S: They were young then.

J: Right. So I worked and brought them up. I never married.

S: Umhm.

J: So I had my hands full.

S: [Unclear]

J: [Unclear]

S: [Unclear]

J: I got four. I got four nice children I'm proud of them, and they all have good jobs.

S: And they're close to you.

J: Umhm, umhm, umhm, umhm.

S: So Lowell is where [unclear] bring up your family?

J: Yes, Lowell is a good city.

S: Umhm.

J: It was good to my father, and he came over from the old country, father

and mother. They never had much of any education. I think mother... See, as I said, there was either twelve or thirteen, eleven or twelve in the father's family, eleven or twelve in the mother's family, but they were on farms.

S: Umhm.

J: The most important thing was, have a lot of children, because there going to help us out in the fields, in the gardens and every where else. (S: Umhm) So the mother only went to about fourth grade in school, and then she left and come out, and then she stayed home and worked on the farm. (S: Umhm) Same way with the father, he'd come home, he'd stay home and he worked on the farm.

S: [Unclear]?

J: No, she didn't have any relations in Lowell at all. Father had a sister and brother, and two brothers. Father had a sister living in Lowell that was married and had children. And he had the Uncle Henry out in Chelmsford that was married and had two children. And then the other brother that lived up Broadway, Willie Street I think it is. He was married and had five, or six, or seven children.

S: [Unclear]

J: I don't know. I never (--) I often say now, there's a million questions I'd like to talk to my...

**End of interview**  
**jw**